

Product Brief: collabolatte

Executive Summary

Collabolatte is a lightweight, opt-in matching platform that quietly increases cross-boundary connections inside large organisations. It tackles a scale problem: valuable conversations never happen because people do not know who to reach, feel awkward initiating, or cannot justify the effort. Collabolatte creates low-friction, shared-risk invitations that make occasional, worthwhile encounters possible without turning connection into a programme. Success is subtle yet meaningful: people occasionally meet someone they would not otherwise have met, feel no pressure to perform, and gradually build a broader mental map of the organisation — especially in hybrid and remote environments where weak ties decay fastest. For sponsors, the value is low-cost, low-risk improvement in knowledge flow and cross-team awareness without heavy measurement or cultural theatre.

Core Vision

Problem Statement

In large organisations, scale and structure make serendipitous cross-boundary connections unlikely. People miss opportunities to meet, learn, and collaborate not because they lack goodwill, but because time pressure, social friction, and lack of visibility make reaching out feel costly and awkward.

Problem Impact

When this goes unsolved, work is reinvented across silos, context travels slowly, and new joiners struggle to build useful internal networks once onboarding energy fades. Hybrid and remote staff see weak ties decay fastest. The cost is mostly invisible but cumulative: ideas stay local, duplication persists, and the organisation feels more fragmented than it needs to be.

Why Existing Solutions Fall Short

Current approaches rely on visibility, confidence, or heavy structure. Informal intros privilege the well-connected; cold outreach feels awkward; and structured schemes (mentoring, ERGs, buddy systems) can feel slow, performative, or high-effort. Many tools optimise for measurement or optics, which erodes trust and participation. Participation often fades once novelty wears off.

Proposed Solution

Collabolatte creates a shared excuse to meet by pairing small groups of people on a gentle cadence. The system initiates the connection, shares the social risk, and keeps the cost low enough that misses are acceptable. It is deliberately light, optional, and privacy-respecting — focused on creating opportunities rather than forcing outcomes or surveilling behaviour.

Key Differentiators

- **Scale, not courage:** Solves the path-crossing problem rather than assuming people need motivation.
- **Shared-risk initiation:** No one has to initiate alone; the system makes the first move.

- **Low-obligation design:** Misses are acceptable; participation remains voluntary and reversible.
- **Trust-preserving by design:** Minimal data, no performance framing, no surveillance signals.
- **Quiet organisational value:** Improves knowledge flow and cross-team awareness without heavy programmes or analytics.

Target Users

Primary Users

1) Cross-Functional Individual Contributors (Primary)

Persona: Alex

- **Role/Context:** Senior analyst/engineer/consultant in a specialist function within a large multinational. Works deeply within a small, familiar team; adjacent interactions are mostly formal.
- **Motivations:** Do good work efficiently, avoid reinventing the wheel, stay curious without performative networking. Wants a broader mental map and a few trusted contacts outside their bubble.
- **Problem Experience (Moment):** Realises mid-project another team solved something similar months ago. Unsure who to contact; cold outreach feels awkward; manager intro feels like overkill; Teams post feels noisy. Proceeds alone, mildly frustrated.
- **Success Moment:** Gets matched with someone outside their function; relaxed chat yields a useful pointer or contact. Leaves thinking “that saved me time” and stays opted-in without fanfare.

2) New Joiners Post-Onboarding (Primary)

Persona: Sam

- **Role/Context:** Associate/PM/analyst, 3–6 months in. Onboarding is over; expected to deliver and “find their feet” in a still-vast organisation.
- **Motivations:** Build a working mental map: who does what, where expertise really sits, and who it’s appropriate to approach.
- **Problem Experience (Moment):** Hears “X has done this before” in a meeting but doesn’t know who X is or if reaching out is appropriate. Teams/Slack feels intimidating; asking for intros feels needy. Works around the gap.
- **Success Moment:** Low-stakes match leads to a human, informal exchange that reveals how the organisation really works. After a few cycles, the organisation feels smaller and safer to navigate.

Secondary Users

3) Hybrid and Remote Workers

- Weak ties decay fastest; fewer chance encounters, less visibility into other teams’ work.
- Collabotatte replaces lost physical serendipity with low-friction connections.

4) Programme Sponsors and Light-Touch Organisers

- Enable adoption without running a heavy initiative.
- Care about trust, participation, and anecdotal outcomes more than control or metrics.
- Need a simple narrative that legitimises the programme without surveillance.

Tertiary / Contextual

5) Managers and Leaders

- Not core users; may participate occasionally.
- See second-order effects (fewer blind spots, faster context sharing).
- Role is to allow and legitimise, not manage or monitor.

Role Rule (to avoid confusion):

- **Participants** experience value.
- **Sponsors** enable conditions.
- **Managers** observe outcomes.

User Journey

Alex (Cross-Functional IC)

- **Discovery:** Hears from a peer in passing: "I had a surprisingly decent coffee with someone random last month — it was via this Collabolate thing."
- **Onboarding:** Minimal signup; basic profile/interest tags; explicit opt-in and low-obligation framing.
- **Core Usage:** Periodic small-group matches; system initiates; Alex joins when timing works.
- **Success Moment:** One conversation yields a practical pointer or new contact; saves time later.
- **Long-term:** Stays opted-in quietly; builds a small network of weak ties across functions.

Sam (New Joiner)

- **Discovery:** Sees a light Teams or onboarding follow-up note: "Optional. Low effort. You'll get matched with a couple of people. No obligation."
- **Onboarding:** Clear reassurance: no performance tracking; meeting is a safe intro.
- **Core Usage:** Matches help decode who does what beyond org charts.
- **Success Moment:** A first conversation provides real context and a safe future contact.
- **Long-term:** Organisation feels smaller; confidence in reaching out increases.

Rachel (Programme Sponsor)

Persona:

- **Role/Context:** HR Director or Practice Lead sponsoring the pilot. Accountable for "employee engagement" but sceptical of heavy programmes. Has budget pressure and limited time.
- **Motivations:** Low-maintenance initiative that shows genuine care without creating administrative burden or surveillance optics.
- **Problem Experience (Moment):** Asked to "do something about connection" post-pandemic. Previous initiatives (mentoring schemes, social events) required constant pushing and faded. Worried about launching something that becomes another obligation.

Journey:

- **Discovery:** Hears about Collabolate from a peer organisation or reads about "coffee lottery" concepts. Intrigued by the low-touch promise.
- **Onboarding:** Receives a one-page brief explaining the trust contract (no individual tracking, no manager visibility). Sees example comms for launch.
- **Launch:** Sends a single, calm announcement. No fanfare, no targets.

- **Ongoing:** Receives a monthly one-line summary (e.g., "47 people opted in, 23 matches this cycle"). No dashboards to check.
- **Success Moment:** At 3 months, hears an unprompted anecdote from a participant. Can say to leadership: "It's running, people like it, and it costs us nothing to maintain."
- **Long-term:** Forgets it's running — which is the point.

Success Metrics

User Success Outcomes (Behaviour-First)

- **Continued participation:** Users remain opted-in across multiple cycles without reminders or incentives.
- **Meetings that actually happen:** Enough matches result in real conversations to feel tangible, not theoretical.
- **Low emotional/cognitive load:** Users don't feel they must prepare, justify time, or extract value.
- **Occasional personal upside:** Some conversations yield learning, context, or a reusable contact.
- **Trust preserved:** Users feel safe skipping, pausing, or opting out; no sense of monitoring.

Behavioural signals:

- Users stay opted-in after the 1st and 2nd cycles.
- Users rejoin after a missed match.
- Users mention the experience to peers without prompting.
- Participation happens without escalation or complaints.

What not to measure at user level:

- Individual meeting frequency
- Conversation quality scoring
- Participation rankings
- Any metric implying performance evaluation

Business Objectives

3-Month Pilot Validation (Credibility, not scale)

- **Stability over growth:** A core group opts-in and stays across at least two cycles.
- **Cross-boundary proof:** Matches and conversations cross real organisational boundaries.
- **Zero backlash:** No complaints about time waste, surveillance, or obligation.
- **Early stories:** A small number of credible anecdotes emerge naturally.

Sponsor takeaway (3 months):

"This is harmless, low-cost, and doing something useful. Let's keep it running."

12-Month Continuation/Expansion (Optionality, confidence)

- **Sustained participation:** Steady opt-in without heavy comms.
- **Organic spread:** People join via peer mention, not mandate.
- **Boundary normalisation:** Cross-team connections feel unremarkable.
- **Repeatable stories:** Pattern of small, believable wins.

- **Still low noise:** No drift into a managed programme or reporting burden.

Sponsor takeaway (12 months):

"This quietly improves how the organisation connects. It's worth modestly expanding."

Adoption strategy:

Stability first, then breadth; depth is a by-product, not a target.

Key Performance Indicators

- Opt-in retention across cycles (define **cycle** as a match cadence window, e.g., monthly).
- % of matches crossing defined organisational boundaries (function, practice, geography).
- Programme longevity without intervention.
- Lightweight qualitative anecdotes from sponsors/participants.
- **Sponsor decision KPI:** "Would you keep this running?" at 3 and 12 months.

Guardrail KPIs:

- Any rise in opt-outs or privacy/surveillance complaints triggers review.
- Meeting-rate remains above a minimal threshold at cohort level (coarse signal only, no individual scoring).

Cost & qualitative outcomes

- Low operating cost vs traditional engagement initiatives
- Reduced duplication via faster informal knowledge routing
- Faster context-building for new joiners and cross-functional work
- Cultural signal: permission to connect without a business case

MVP Scope

Core Features

- **Identity and trust:** Corporate sign-in; minimal profile (name, function/department, location). No self-promotion.
- **One public programme:** Single, clearly framed programme with one cadence (e.g., monthly).
- **Opt-in participation:** One-click join; one-click leave/pause; no consequences.
- **Matching:** Simple, transparent rule; 1:1 pairs (MVP); larger groups can come post-MVP; avoid obvious repeats.
- **Clear nudge:** Match notification with explicit first-move prompt; Teams or email is sufficient.
- **Do nothing else:** No scheduling, chat, feedback forms, or dashboards.

Match Notification Content

Example copy for the match notification email. Tone: calm, low-pressure, permission-giving.

Subject: You've been matched with [Name] from [Department]

Body:

Hi [Your Name],

This cycle, you've been matched with **[Match Name]** from **[Department/Function]** in **[Location]**.

What happens next? Nothing, unless you'd like to. If you fancy a quick chat, here's a ready-to-send message:

"Hi [Match Name], we've been matched through Collabolate this cycle. Fancy a 15-minute virtual coffee sometime in the next couple of weeks? No agenda — just a chance to say hello. Let me know what works for you, or feel free to ignore this if it's not a good time."

[Copy to clipboard] · [Open Teams chat]

No pressure. If this cycle doesn't work, you'll be matched again next time. No one is tracking whether you meet.

Cheers, Collabolate

MVP in one sentence:

A single, opt-in programme that periodically matches pairs across organisational boundaries and nudges them to meet, with no obligation and no surveillance.

Out of Scope for MVP (explicitly deferred)

- Calendar scheduling or availability management
- In-app chat or messaging
- Feedback forms, surveys, or ratings
- Multiple programmes or programme discovery
- User-created programmes
- Algorithm selection or optimisation
- AI-driven matching or profiling
- Dashboards, leaderboards, or analytics views
- Slack support (Teams only for MVP)
- HRIS integration
- Any form of individual participation reporting
- Any feature implying evaluation, performance, or tracking

MVP Success Criteria (Go / No-Go)

Go signals (after 1–2 cycles):

- Meaningful proportion of participants stay opted-in after cycle 2.
- Some matches result in real conversations (not all, but enough).
- Conversations cross genuine organisational boundaries.
- No complaints about pressure, time waste, or surveillance.
- At least one unprompted anecdote of value emerges.

No-go signals:

- Sharp drop-off after the first cycle.
- Matches happen but meetings rarely do.

- Participants stay opted-in but disengage silently.
- Feedback indicates obligation rather than curiosity.
- The product needs reminders or pushing to function.

Future Vision (post-MVP, in order)

1. **Conversation support** – optional starters and gentle framing for first-time matches.
2. **Safety valves** – one free pass per cycle; match expiry window.
3. **Programme flexibility** – additional programmes with clear purpose; controlled creation by trusted sponsors.
4. **Boundary shaping** – light constraints to encourage cross-function/region matching.
5. **Growth mechanics** – gift a match; time-boxed experiments.

Nothing here changes the core idea; it reduces friction or expands reach once trust is established.

Technical Constraints

Key technical decisions affecting product scope and delivery. See [architecture.md](#) for full details.

Platform & Identity

- **Azure Static Web Apps** with built-in authentication (EasyAuth) — no custom login screens
- **Microsoft Entra ID** (corporate SSO) is the only identity provider for MVP
- **Single-tenant deployment** — one organisation initially; multi-tenant architecture deferred

Data & Privacy

- **Azure Table Storage** partitioned by programme — enforces data isolation at the infrastructure level
- **Programme-scoped queries only** — cross-programme data access is architecturally blocked
- **12-month match retention** — user deletion requests honoured promptly

Notifications

- **Email is authoritative** (Azure Communication Services) — delivery logging and retry built in
- **Teams is additive** — deep links in notifications, but email remains the guaranteed fallback
- **No SMS** in MVP

Cost & Scaling

- **All-Free tier deployment** — consumption-based serverless; no pre-provisioned capacity
- **No Key Vault or Application Insights** in MVP — secrets via environment variables; basic platform logs only
- **Upgrade hooks** in architecture for Key Vault, App Insights, and dynamic role management when needed

Constraints Affecting Product Decisions

- **No real-time features** — matching runs on a scheduled cadence, not on-demand
- **Aggregate reporting only** — minimum-N threshold of 5 to prevent re-identification

- **Role management via allowlist** — Programme Owner/Admin roles assigned manually (no self-service UI)